

## High Blood Pressure - The James

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Blood pressure is the pressure of the blood in your arteries. Arteries are groups of tubes that carry blood from your heart to the rest of your body. As blood moves through your arteries, they contract (get smaller) and expand (get bigger). When your arteries contract, the pressure inside them gets higher. When your arteries expand, the pressure inside them gets lower. High blood pressure, also called **hypertension**, is when your arteries stay contracted (small) or get clogged.

### How is blood pressure measured?

When your blood pressure is measured, 2 numbers are recorded. The top number, your **systolic** blood pressure, is the pressure in your arteries each time blood is pushed out of your heart. The bottom number, your **diastolic** blood pressure, is the pressure in your arteries when your heart relaxes between beats. **The harder it is for blood to flow through your arteries, the higher your blood pressure will be.**

Your blood pressure may be checked several times to make sure the measurement is accurate. Your doctor may also continue to check your blood pressure over time, before you are diagnosed with high blood pressure. It is important to keep your blood pressure under control, especially if you have other health conditions, such as diabetes or kidney disease or are at risk for strokes.

### Blood Pressure Categories

- **Normal blood pressure:** systolic less than 120 and diastolic less than 80 diastolic.
- **Elevated blood pressure:** systolic 120 to 129 and diastolic less than 80.
- **High blood pressure (hypertension) stage 1:** systolic 130 to 139 or diastolic 80 to 89.

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This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

- **High blood pressure (hypertension) stage 2:** systolic 140 or higher or diastolic 90 or higher.
- **Hypertensive crisis (call your doctor right away):** systolic higher than 180 and/or diastolic higher than 120.

## High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure means that your heart is working harder to pump blood to the rest of your body. High blood pressure usually has no symptoms, but if left untreated, it can cause other health problems such as a heart attack, stroke, kidney failure and hardening of your arteries (atherosclerosis).

In most cases, the cause of high blood pressure is unknown. There is no cure for high blood pressure, but it can be controlled. Lifestyle changes and medicines can help to lower your blood pressure. Your doctor will talk with you about treatment options.

### If you have high blood pressure:

- Learn how to check your blood pressure at home and what to do if your blood pressure is higher than normal.
- Take your medicine(s) as ordered by your doctor.
  - ▶ **Do not stop taking your medicine(s) before you talk with your doctor.**
  - ▶ Continue to take your medicine(s) even if you feel fine and your blood pressure is normal.
  - ▶ Tell your doctor about any side effects you have.
- Talk to your health care team about lifestyle changes that can help lower your blood pressure. These may include:
  - ▶ **Lose weight**, if you are overweight.
  - ▶ **Lower your sodium (salt) intake.** Sodium can cause your body to hold on to fluid. This can make the pressure inside your arteries higher and cause your heart to work harder to pump blood.
  - ▶ **Exercise** for at least 30 minutes most days of the week. Look for ways to increase your activity during the day. Brisk walking is a good activity for most adults. Talk with your doctor before you start a new exercise program.

- ▶ **Limit alcohol.** If you drink at all, it is recommended that women drink no more than 1 drink each day and men drink no more than 2 drinks each day.
- ▶ **Find ways to relax.** Being able to relax can make you feel better and help to lower your blood pressure.
- ▶ **Do not smoke.** If you smoke, plan to quit. Talk to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist about medicines or other ways that can help you stop smoking.